



### **What is Palmetto STARS?**

Palmetto STARS is a 5 star voluntary rating system for child care and early education providers based on the quality of their staff and program. This interagency effort expands the state's current 3 level voluntary child care rating system at the SC Department of Social Services and includes the SC Department of Education's four-year-old kindergarten programs. The rating system "levels the playing field" so that parents can compare all of their choices when looking for quality child care centers and preschool programs. Palmetto STARS improves accountability for all programs through a single set of state standards.

### **Why does South Carolina need Palmetto STARS?**

Thirty-seven states, including North Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee now have quality rating systems. South Carolina parents need a simple quality rating system to help them choose care. Palmetto STARS incorporates principles of the SC Task Force on Quality Early Care and Education, which set forth a 15-year vision for SC's early care and education system based on national research. Twenty-eight SC organizations support the Task Force vision.

### **What are the benefits of Palmetto STARS?**

- ❖ *Children* will benefit with better preparation for success in school, which can lead to increased likelihood of graduating and getting a better job.
- ❖ *Parents* will be able to make informed choices when a program's quality is clearly rated by the number of stars.
- ❖ *Child care and early education providers* working hard to improve quality will be recognized for providing quality care to the children they serve. Providers will also have a clear understanding of what they need to do to continue to improve the quality of the care and education in their center.

### **What are the new levels of quality under Palmetto STARS?**

- Level 1: \* DSS Child Care License (currently in place)
- Level 2: \*\* Upgrades to quality of staff and program (currently in place)
- Level 3: \*\*\* Substantial upgrades to quality of staff and program (new level)
- Level 4: \*\*\*\* High level of overall quality of staff and program (new level)
- Level 5: \*\*\*\*\* Highest national standards of excellence (currently in place)

Palmetto STARS will emphasize to parents and providers that quality begins at Star 1; simply being licensed is an initial indicator of quality. The current system includes three levels: 1 - licensed centers; 2 - ABC-Enhanced (meeting standards above licensing); and 3 - national accreditation (model programs). The two new levels fill in the gaps in the state's current system.

### **Is South Carolina ready to improve the current system?**

- ❖ 940 of the state's 1,336 licensed centers (70%) already meet the level 2 ABC-Enhanced standards.
- ❖ Many childcare providers have improved quality through grants and intensive training from First Steps and the federally funded ABC Child Care Program (DSS).

### **How will Palmetto STARS work?**

The SC Department of Social Services and SC Department of Education will conduct the Palmetto STARS ratings using a common set of standards. A core assessment team of inter-agency staff trained to reliability will conduct reviews statewide to assure accountability. Technical assistance will be outsourced to First Steps, United Way Success By 6®, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and others to help child care providers get ready for Palmetto STARS.